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ABSTRACT

Based on a nationwide survey of urban school administrators, personal experiences of the author, and a review of relevant desegregation literature, this paper explores the role of administrators in the achievement of the objectives of busing for school desegregation. Findings cited from the survey include: (1) peak periods of conflict occur in the fall and spring: (2) most of the actions by school administrators prior to peak periods of conflict focus on the involvement of and communication with community groups: (3) effective organization and planning for community group involvement are critical factors in desegregation: and (4) the actions/inactions and spoken or implied promises of administrators affect conflict over desegregation and busing. It is held that one of the greatest leadership assets is the administrator's demonstrated commitment to goal attainment. Other important aspects of leadership are said to be the assessment of the uniqueness of each school situation and good communication with the community. Guidelines for administrative behavior when seeking such communication are presented. Finally, a number of strategies for effecting good leadership in the area of desegregation organization and planning are provided. (GC)

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LEADERSHIP THRUST OF URBAN SCHOOL EDUCATORS FOR MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF BUSING

Presented to
the Fifth Annual
Conference of the National
Urban Education Association

by
Joseph C. Sommerville
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Leadership Thrust for Meeting the Challenge of Busing

Joseph C. Sommerville[a]

It must be assumed that the focus on busing is secondary to a primary objective which is the effective desegregation of the schools. The busing issue per se, except when connected with the desegregation issue, does not appear to be a major concern in urban education. According to the recent report of the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of students riding the bus at public expense has more than tripled since 1950[1]. In that same report the bureau concluded that changing residential patterns and gradual consolidation of small schools into larger districts was the primary reason for the widespread use of buses. Yet, little or no national attention has been given to busing for those reasons. On the other hand, busing often becomes the major issue when used to facilitate desegregation. Thus, this paper and presentation will focus on leadership behavior in the desegregation struggle. It is based on an exploratory investigation of administrative behavior as it relates to groups and individuals in the struggle, personal experiences, and a review of the desegregation literature.

Operating as the "middle man" the school administrator[b] has faced, and will no doubt continue to face, many challenges relating to the desegregation of schools. (S)he is considered the person in the middle, because though often

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[b]School administrator, in this writing, refers to the superintendent specifically and to other line administrators (assistant superintendents, directors, principals) generally.

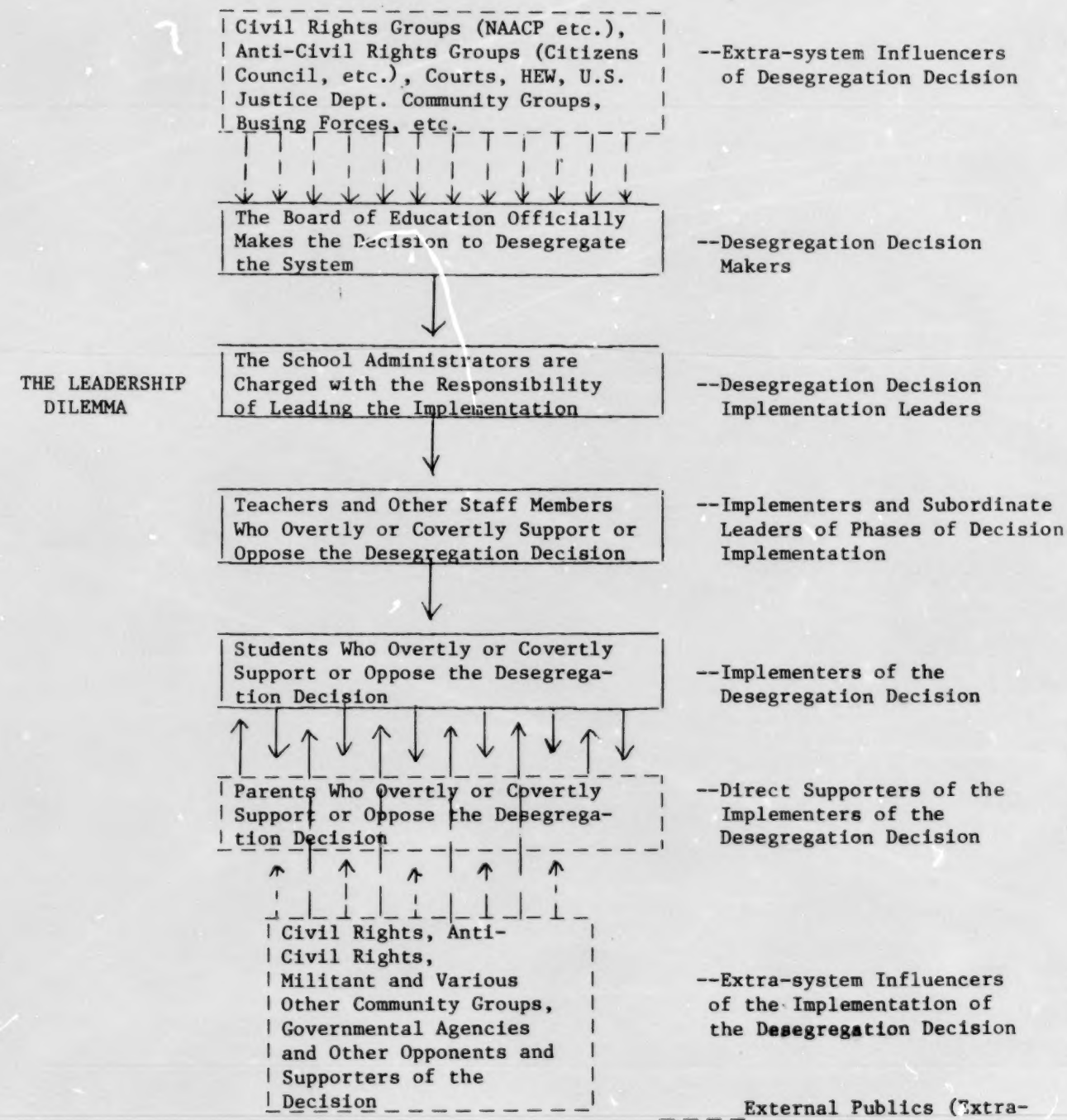
influential, the administrator does not make the official decision to desegregate; yet, (s)he is often the target of reactions to that decision. The board of education usually holds and zealously guards that decision-making authority. The school administrator is therefore charged with the responsibility of leading the implementation of a board's decision which has often been influenced by pressure groups, the courts, the state and/or federal agencies. That decision may be covertly or overtly accepted or rejected by the students, staff, community and/or significant sub-groups. The diversity of reactions to the decision and its implementation--in an emotional climate--frequently presents a desegregation dilemma of the first magnitude for school administrators (see Figure 1). In spite of the magnitude of the challenge, many administrators have been successful in facilitating and influencing individual and group cooperative behavior in the processes of achieving effective school desegregation. Such behavioral acts of an individual, which through relationship and communication with other persons, tend to influence the movement of groups toward the attainment of a sought-after outcome, exemplify leadership thrust. The leadership thrust of school administrators as it relates to individuals and groups in the desegregation struggle is therefore the focus of this presentation. Some of the results from an investigation of that thrust are shared as a resource for those who are interested in enhancing their understanding of the processes and increasing the likelihood of success in meeting the leadership challenges of school desegregation and the supportive process of busing.

Investigation Highlights

Superintendents of 158 school districts--with a Black population of at least ten percent--were randomly selected and sent a questionnaire about their behavior as it related to individuals and groups in the desegregation struggle. Responses were received from administrators of school districts in 32 states

Figure 1

Model of the Desegregation Leadership Dilemma
for School Administrators


Civil Rights Groups (NAACP etc.), Anti-Civil Rights Groups (Citizens Council, etc.), Courts, HEW, U.S. Justice Dept. Community Groups, Busing Forces, etc.
--Extra-system Influencers of Desegregation Decision
The Board of Education Officially Makes the Decision to Desegregate the System
--Desegregation Decision Makers
THE LEADERSHIP DILEMMA
The School Administrators are Charged with the Responsibility of Leading the Implementation
--Desegregation Decision Implementation Leaders
Teachers and Other Staff Members Who Overtly or Covertly Support or Oppose the Desegregation Decision
--Implementers and Subordinate Leaders of Phases of Decision Implementation
Students Who Overtly or Covertly Support or Oppose the Desegregation Decision
--Implementers of the Desegregation Decision
Parents Who Overtly or Covertly Support or Oppose the Desegregation Decision
--Direct Supporters of the Implementers of the Desegregation Decision
Civil Rights, Anti-Civil Rights, Militant and Various Other Community Groups, Governmental Agencies and Other Opponents and Supporters of the Decision
--Extra-system Influencers of the Implementation of the Desegregation Decision
External Publics (Extra-system Influencers)
Internal Publics (Board Administrators, staff and students)

well distributed throughout the country. Their responses were analyzed with a focus on (1) patterns of conflict, management procedures, and specific behavioral acts that tended to stimulate desirable and undesirable individual and group responses, and (2) techniques employed that tended to minimize and/or avoid crises, conflict and negative controversy.[2]

It is understood that some of the respondents may have provided more positive or negative descriptions of the situation and their behavior than is accurate. However, we have reasons to believe that they provided an accurate report of their perceptions of administrative behavior as it relates to groups and individuals in the desegregation struggle. Some of the key findings from that nationwide survey of urban school chief administrators who have been involved in potential and/or actual conflict relating to school desegregation were: (1) Peak periods of conflict occurred most frequently during the fall. Though considerably less often, spring was identified as a period of comparatively frequent conflict, (2) Conflicts occurred most often in the form of interpersonal and group interaction than in the form of violent and physical confrontation, (3) Initial mandates to desegregate evolved about equally from the courts and local boards of education (almost two-thirds of those who indicated that desegregation evolved from court orders were from the south and about one-half of those reporting that the plans evolved from board initiated action were from the midwest), (4) School administrators acted in diverse ways prior to peak periods of conflict. However, the majority of those actions focused on the involvement of and communication with significant community groups. Organization and effective planning for that involvement appeared to be critical factors, (5) The effective implementation of a desegregation plan and the establishment of improved communication links with community groups were the most rewarding experiences for the superintendents, (6) Community organizations, teachers and parents were the most helpful groups in minimizing the negative effects of conflicts.

Other groups (students, administrators and auxiliary staffs) also played a major supporting role in the process, (7) Those administrators who would change their behavior if faced with a similar desegregation conflict situation, indicated that they would (a) facilitate more involvement of and communication with community groups and (b) weigh more carefully and anticipate the consequences of pending administrative action in the struggle, (8) Supplying accurate information and involving key individuals were deemed to be crucial in stimulating desirable responses from groups, (9) Conflict occurred in a variety of forms and the situations were frequently aggravated by both the administrator's action and failure to act, (10) Those described techniques and approaches which focused on the processes and procedures of facilitating interaction between and among individuals and groups appeared to be most effective in meeting the leadership challenges of desegregation.

Leadership Thrust and the Administrator

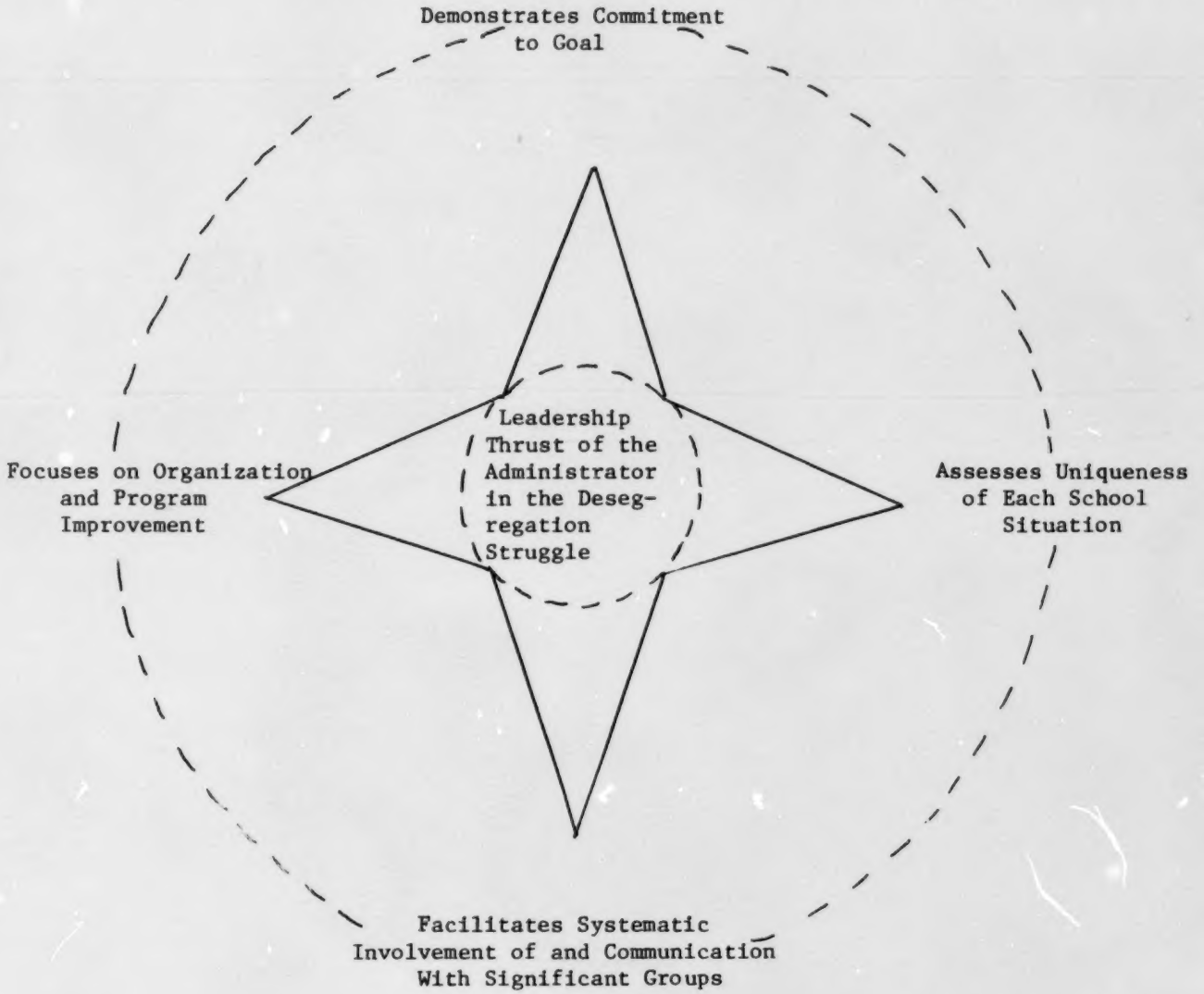
There are no doubt many aspects of the leadership thrust of the administrator which have played important roles in desegregation. However, those which appear to surface most readily are characterized as the tendency for the school administrator to: (1) exhibit a positive personal commitment to goal attainment, (2) assess the dynamics of his/her unique school situation, (3) involve and communicate effectively with diverse school related groups, and (4) focus attention on the potential student benefits of organizational and programmatic changes (see Figure 2).

Exhibiting Administrator's Commitment to Goal

Perhaps one of the greatest assets in the administrator's leadership thrust is his/her demonstrated commitment to goal attainment. Gross and Herriott found in their classic study that the executive leadership of the

Figure 2

Model of Features of the Administrator's Leadership Thrust in the Desegregation Struggle


Demonstrates Commitment to Goal
Focuses on Organization and Program Improvement
Leadership Thrust of the Administrator in the Desegregation Struggle
Assesses Uniqueness of Each School Situation
Facilitates Systematic Involvement of and Communication With Significant Groups

superordinate, the principal's immediate superior, was positively related to the executive professional leadership behavior of the subordinate, the school principal.[3] Forehand et al. in their study--of conditions and practices of effective school desegregation in 96 elementary and 72 high schools--found that the principal's racial attitude seems to have a direct influence on the attitudes of teachers and the teachers' attitudes had a direct effect on the attitudes of the white students in both elementary and secondary schools. In short, the principal's attitude appears to be a significant antecedent to some conditions (positive attitudes of teachers and students) associated with successful integration.[4] This principle of superordinate behavior influencing subordinate behavior seems to be evident in a number of situations in the desegregation struggle.

More than one-fourth of the superintendents in our investigation indicated that providing leadership for the successful implementation of desegregation was their most successful and/or rewarding experience--many of whom specified that their demonstrated personal commitment contributed to that success. A Milwaukee Journal feature story discussed the important role Superintendent Lee McMurrin played in the peaceful desegregation of the city's schools. It focused on his demonstrated commitment, as well as his positive and optimistic attitude about the plan.[5] His leadership thrust was no doubt a key factor in the many articles written about the successes in desegregation in Milwaukee.[6,7]

We agree with Green in his assertion that advocacy is the key to leadership of the urban school superintendent.[8] Major changes in school systems usually need "prodding by someone with clout."[9] However, that advocacy, an important element of leadership thrust, is often questioned and is the focus of the reactions of significant groups in the desegregation struggle. In the Sagninaw staff integration case study, the teacher association leader made it

clear that his group would support the moves of the administration if the "board did not play games with the contract."[10] The Judge in the Dallas Independent School District school desegregation case ruled that school officials were to "cease 'playing games' and surrender 'meaningful' data to the Dallas minority plaintiff (Legal Services)."[11] In a study of desegregation of eight cities, Crain et al. found that in six of eight cities studied, school integration quickly become a conflict between the movement and the superintendent.[12] It is therefore important that the leadership thrust of the school administrator, his/her commitment and advocacy are characterized by honesty and by the presentation of complete and accurate information about changes. Skeptism, rumors and counter-productive controversy are often allayed or avoided by "above board" effective two-way communication about the pertinent intracacies of potential and operational desegregation.

Appraising Each School Situation

An important facet of leadership thrust is assessing the uniqueness of each school situation. The dynamics of each school setting are naturally different. The timing, climate, nature of the interpersonal and group relationships, existing organization and programs, physical and financial resources are all factors which should be assessed. Statistics regarding changing racial composition of city schools such as those of New York where the white student population decreased from 68 percent to 14 percent in 30 years must be considered.[13] Looking at these data, the rapidly changing racial climate, and progress of city integration, one is likely to agree with Hesburgh, former U.S. Civil Rights Commissioner's statement that the "nation's efforts to integrate inner-city schools are 'sliding backward' from the late 1960's."[14] It is within that context and within the context of the idiosyncracies of each school system that the adminis-

trator of today must exert leadership thrust for successful desegregation.

Crain et al.,[15] Kirby et al.[16] and Mayer et al.[17] all delineate the dominant role community elites (key influential persons) have played in desegregation. However, many of the respondents in our investigation, identified minority church organizations and ministers, ghetto residents, parents, staff personnel and other traditionally non-elitist groups as most helpful in the desegregation of their districts. Though the potential of the usually powerful elites should be recognized, other groups and individuals--regardless of their community socioeconomic status--who may contribute to success of desegregation, should be an integral part of an assessment and the focus of the administrator's leadership thrust.

It is advisable that the administrator in his/her assessment gives careful consideration to the plans, processes and experiences of other districts, and facilitates the utilization of those components which are applicable in the district (s)he serves. Such an eclectic approach appears to be an important element in the processes of providing leadership thrust for successful school desegregation.[18]

Involving and Communicating With Groups and Individuals

One thing that almost all of the literature and the respondents in our investigation appear to agree on, is that involvement of and communication with people are important facets of the desegregation process. The problem and question seem to be involvement and communication with whom, how, when, and why? There is no way to answer effectively all of those questions in this brief writing. We contend that there is no one answer for all districts. However, certain general guidelines seem to evolve from our study of administrative behavior in desegregation. Those guidelines are:

1. Who?--both the internal (faculty and staff) and the external (community and agencies) publics should be an integral part of

the processes of making, planning, and implementing the desegregation decision. Inasmuch as the school districts and community groups tend not to agree on the identification of problems associated with desegregation,[19] the need for interaction between the two seems evident. Multiethnic and multifaceted representation should be an aim of the leadership thrust for organizing and involving advisory groups. In addition to communications through the usual media, that thrust should focus on providing accurate ongoing information to various groups, including the opposition.

2. How?--a structured system for two-way communication and involvement should be established. The organization for securing community and staff input ought to include representatives of both pro and con viewpoints. One respondent to the questionnaire briefly discussed the unrest in the community caused by the board organizing a "stacked" advisory committee. Roles, functions and legal limits of the authority of committees must be clarified. Groups need to be organized effectively for productive interaction. If the administrator does not possess this organizational skill, he should provide the leadership thrust for securing competent assistance for such an important task.

3. When?--communication and involvement should generally be fostered as an integral part of the processes of making decisions rather than--as is generally the case--reacting to decisions already made. Success in reducing tension and in effective integration depends on the extent to which constituent groups were involved in communicating and working together.[20] Leadership thrust must focus on articulating, involving and communicating with representative groups early in the processes of evolving plans for the actual implementation.

4. Why?--the common expectation that open confrontation of racial feeling is a Pandora's box of destruction and chaos, the attitudes held by those unaccustomed to positive racial interaction,[21] and the myths, uncertainties and natural resistance to change are all valid reasons for effective communication with and involvement of those who must implement and support successful desegregation. Fear is an important element in the motivation of conflict.[22] Through interaction, involvement, communication, and appropriate training, people usually surface important problems and collaboratively arrive at creative solutions.[23] Effective facilitation and coordination, an important facet of leadership thrust, appears to be essential for success in that process.

Focusing on Organization and Programs

We accept, with some important additions, Kirby et al's. assertion that school desegregation must be designed by expert administrators within the system in order to be politically acceptable.[24] Those additions are, the design should be (1) conceived creatively to meet some previously unmet needs of students served by the system, (2) presented effectively following the principles of two-way communication with the staff and community, and (3) structured expertly to reflect consideration of instructional improvement, the existing climate and experiences of other systems.

Alternative designs to meet some unmet needs of students are plentiful. Chase discussed many of these alternatives.[25] The magnet school concept is no doubt the most popular in the desegregation process. However, its popularity and successes are often diminished when the negative ramifications of such a design are not carefully considered.[26] The impact of alternatives on those students not directly involved must be a consideration. Special attention must also be given to the importance of family income as it relates to academic success and needs of students,[27] if designs by expert administrators are to effectively meet the needs of all students served by the system.

In the presentation of the desegregation design, the administrator must effectively relate to his followers and environment of the situation.[28] Timing, unity and consistency are important factors. Smith et al. stressed that (1) the superintendent's initial speech is very influential in establishing attitudes of the entire community toward school desegregation, and (2) it is important that there is consistency between the opening day speeches of the school principal and superintendent.[29] Astute coordination of the quality of the school system's presentation is an essential aspect of the administrator's leadership thrust.

Harris stated that "leadership for improvement of instruction is still an urgent need in America, and is in very scarce supply."[30] Leadership thrust which facilitates and articulates instructional program improvement and effective integration meets a dual urgent need--instructional improvement and the understanding of cultural diversity. Many districts (Dallas, Milwaukee, Seattle, and others) have reported successes in both desegregation and program improvement. Designs with such a dual focus are usually more successful.

We are not so naive as to suggest that the administrator of each school district alone could exert the leadership thrust for the needed instructional improvement and the integration of schools. The possible constraints on individual leadership are almost too numerous to mention. White flight, citizen and staff attitudes, the reluctance of courts, Congress, civil rights groups and/or board to act, and the racial demography of the school district are commonly identified barriers to school desegregation. In spite of those real and/or imaginary barriers, each school administrator can and should provide leadership thrust, as discussed herein, for a more pointed focus on (1) providing equity[31] of educational opportunity for all students, (2) upgrading the instructional program, and (3) offering opportunities for students to experience and better understand our multicultural society.

Providing a meaningful leadership thrust that focuses on the often emotional issue of desegregation, even if instructional improvement is a part of the package, is risky in many districts. Thus, the processes, approaches and techniques employed in exhibiting such leadership thrust are important factors. Those guidelines discussed in our "Triple T" model are suggested.[32] Whether those or some other principles are applied, school administrators and persons in responsible positions ought to exert that leadership thrust which is essential for meeting the challenge of school desegregation, a great need in American education.

Meeting the Challenge

The challenge for the school administrator in the desegregation struggle is one of major proportions. It is multidimensional and multifaceted. In order to meet that challenge, school administrators and other influential leaders need to exert leadership thrust for effectuating changes and getting things done through people. Suggested considerations (RAACEFF) seem to be evident. They are, in summary, the administrator or any other person in similar key positions should:

--Recognize that (s)he functions as the "person-in-middle" who must effectively relate to the desegregation decision makers and implementers; and that (s)he personally is likely to be the focus of reactions to that decision and its implementation.

--Assess the climate, timing and available resources, consider the experiences of other districts, and carefully develop a tentative plan and strategy for effectively influencing and/or implementing desegregation decisions.

--Accept the function of organizing, coordinating, and involving representative individuals and groups in the processes of desegregation.

--Communicate effectively and continuously with external (media, parents, diverse community groups including the opposition, agencies) and internal (staff, board, and student) publics.

--Exhibit a personal commitment to goal attainment displaying professional behavior which may set a good example for subordinates and the community.

--Facilitate interpersonal and group interaction designed to allay common concerns, resolve problems, and improve attitudes relating to desegregation.

--Focus on creative organizations, interschool and district arrangements and programs for (1) meeting unmet needs, (2) upgrading instruction for the students served by the district, and on, (3) carefully articulating the expected outcome of designs for instructional improvement and desegregation.

The information presented in this writing is not intended as the "cookbook" guide for providing leadership thrust to meet all challenges for the administrator in the desegregation process. Instead, it is shared as an additional resource for meeting the general challenge of school desegregation.

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